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29 May 1986PRESIDENT PRAISES WARRIORS OF "TWILIGHT WAR"
BY MICHAEL PUTZEL
WASHINGTON

President Reagan saluted the quiet warriors of "a twilight war" on Thursday, defending their work as OSS secret agents in World War II and the veil under which they operated.

"It's because secrecy has been your business that you all know how vital it is to your nation's safety and freedom's survival," Reagan said at a dinner for veterans of the old Office of Strategic Services.

One of those to whom he paid special tribute was former OSS officer and now CIA Director William Casey, who is leading a public drive to keep the news media from disclosing secrets about intelligence-gathering operations that may have been compromised by Ronald Pelton, a former National Security Agency employee accused of selling secrets to the Soviet Union.

The president did not specifically mention that controversy.

He poked fun at Casey, joking that he had asked his spy chief for directions to the dinner. "Go to 17th and K (streets) and wait for the phone to ring," was the reply, Reagan said, briefly putting aside the prepared speech on the importance of spy secrecy.

Quoting remarks by Gen. George Washington during the Revolutionary War, Reagan said the nation's first president told one of his officers: "The necessity of procuring good intelligence is apparent and need not be further urged. All that remains for me to add is that you keep the whole matter as secret as possible. For upon secrecy, success depends in most enterprises of this kind, and for want of it, they are generally defeated, however well planned and promising." "Even then, Washington seemed to sense that this business of secrecy does not come easily to us Americans," said Reagan, who often has criticized leaks of both intelligence information and policy disputes within his administration. "We are rightly regarded as a candid and open people who pride ourselves on our free society."

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"And yet, our secret services, our spies and intelligence agencies ... have often provided the key to victory in war and the preservation of our freedom during an uneasy peace." "I can't think of a more distinguished gathering than this one," he said. "Nor can I think of any group whose accomplishments and devotion to country makes them more worthy of accolades and praise."

"And yet it is precisely that praise and those accolades that you decided to forego when you chose a twilight war, a secret profession, a profession where praise and thanks can only come from history and not your contemporaries." He called the veterans of the OSS "those who heard no bugles and received no medals but who struggled and sacrificed so that freedom might endure." "Let me say to each of you tonight what the American people would have said 40 years ago had they known your story," Reagan said. "We honor you; we salute you; we thank you for a job well done." While praising superspies like Casey and OSS chief Gen. William J. Donovan Reagan also picked a name from the rolls of shame, especially among spies loyal to their homelands.

"I think in particular of one man who is a symbol of much that was wrong with our world," Reagan said. "How uneasy must be the Moscow nights of Kim Philby as he sees the new will, vigor and energy of the West and especially the renaissance of our intelligence services. How he and others like him must realize that it was those they betrayed who are on the winning side after all." Philby was a double agent high in the ranks of British counterintelligence who escaped to the Soviet Union after betraying some of his country's most valuable secrets.